

# PAST LIVES, FUTURE LIVES AND THE NATURE OF TIME

*Under a rational spiritual worldview based on modern scientific research into past and future lives, karma involves choices and learning rather than predestination and reactions to past events.*

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When I was writing my second book, *Genesis Unveiled*, I adopted a broad spiritual worldview based on the twin ideas of reincarnation and karma as the framework within which the ancient global traditions about humanity's prehistory should be interpreted. And this set off an interesting chain of events. First, my publisher insisted that a few footnoted references as evidence for this worldview were insufficient, which forced me to undertake some late additional research so that I could insert a whole new chapter containing said evidence at the beginning of the book.

I was already hugely impressed by the research performed by psychologist Ian Stevenson, from the University of Virginia, into children who spontaneously recall past lives. But I also discovered, somewhat by coincidence, the work of Californian psychologist Michael Newton. At the time, I was somewhat sceptical of past-life regression in general, assuming as do so many others that it is too subjective a line of research, with too great a possibility of subjects being actively led by their regressor. But what attracted me about Newton's work was the consistency with which his subjects described the *interlife*, or their "life between lives" in the ethereal realms. Moreover, his transcripts of sessions seemed to preclude any significant possibility of subjective leading, inasmuch as subjects regularly laughed at or even scolded him if he said something they thought ridiculous or inaccurate.

Then, when *Genesis Unveiled* was published in 2002, I found that a great many people were fascinated by the evidence in this new chapter. My appetite whetted, and again with a series of fortunate coincidences, I soon established that a number of other pioneering psychologists and psychiatrists had researched the interlife, many of them before Newton, and with broadly consistent results. No one seemed to have collated and compared this research before, so I felt that this was an important book that needed to be written.

A variety of other factors have come into play since then. I decided to go back to basics and write a book that contained all the evidence in support of a reincarnatory worldview, even including vital near-death-experience research that turned out to provide some important corroboration of interlife experiences. On proper investigation, I also found that I had been wrong to write-off general past-life regression, for two important reasons that we shall examine shortly. So on the one hand, and unpremeditated, I found that I was building a basic spiritual framework based entirely on modern evidence rather than on "revealed wisdom". On the other, it became increasingly obvious to me that materialists' attempts to explain away these various lines of research were totally inadequate—indeed, completely *illogical* given the breadth and depth of evidence on the table. Although I had flirted with the idea before, this is what convinced me that coining the term "*rational spirituality*" was entirely appropriate.

However, later on, in the final review stages of the book, I found that I was still struggling with the dynamics of karma and the idea that it is based upon some sort of "action and reaction" or "reaping what you sow". After much confusion and deliberation, I came to what I feel to be a vital conclusion concerning the inappropriateness of this view, as I shall explain shortly. But again, this cemented my desire to distance the spiritual framework I was developing from any revealed wisdom of the past.

*The Book of the Soul: Rational Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*, my latest book, was published at the end of 2004. In this article, I intend to summarise the evidence and analysis relating to reincarnation and karma, all of which can be found in the book with appropriate source references.

## Past Lives, Reincarnation and Karma

Almost single-handedly over several decades, Ian Stevenson pioneered research into children who spontaneously recall past lives. Only now, in semi-retirement, is he starting to achieve the recognition he so richly deserves. Many of his cases involve verifiable details that are so obscure they could not have been obtained by normal means, unless deliberate collusion and deception were involved—and his methodology has been deliberately designed to spot these and other suspect motives.

To summarize just one of his more impressive cases, from an early age Swarnlata Mishra spontaneously recalled details of the life of another Indian girl called Biya Pathak, who had lived in a separate town some way away from her present home and whose family was eventually traced. Stevenson found that, in all, she made 49 statements about her previous life, only a few of which could be regarded as in any sense inaccurate and 18 of which were made before there had been any contact whatsoever between the two families.

These statements included identifying former family members, sometimes while being actively *misdirected*, coming up with little-known nicknames and even disclosing to her former husband that he had taken 1,200 rupees from her money box—something known only to the two of them. There are many more similarly impressive cases in Stevenson's files.

If we now turn to past-life regression, its value as a proof of reincarnation lies in two main areas. The first and most obvious again involves cases in which historical details emerge that are not only verifiable but also are so obscure that they could not have been obtained by any normal means—and, again, in which the possibility of deliberate deception is so remote as to be negligible.

Some of the finest examples come from Australian psychologist Peter Ramster's research, which has certainly not had the ongoing exposure, at least outside of Australia, that it undoubtedly deserves. Ramster became so intrigued by the past-life memories of several of his better subjects that he decided to take them to Europe where these lives had supposedly taken place and which they had never before visited in their current life. He also put together a documentary film crew to record the events under controlled conditions.

One of his finest subjects was Gwen McDonald. She initially remembered a number of obscure details of the 18th-century life of a girl called Rose Duncan, who lived in Glastonbury, England. When she was brought to England, local historians and residents verified all these details—including obscure or obsolete names of places and people, obsolete elements of local dialect, and details of houses and other buildings as they had existed in the 18th century.

Most stunning was her insistence that she had been taken to a cottage whose floor stones had been stolen from Glastonbury Abbey; one of them had an obscure carving on it, which she had sketched while still in Sydney. When she led them to what was now a dilapidated chicken shed and after they swept away the

decades of droppings, there was the carving exactly as she had drawn it! Again, Ramster and others provide many more similarly impressive cases.

The other way in which past-life regression provides impressive proof of reincarnation is in those cases that involve dramatic therapeutic benefits. Many of the pioneering past-life therapists, whose work blossomed in the 1960s and 1970s, were scientifically trained psychologists and psychiatrists but most of them were initially of a sceptical or atheistic persuasion. These pioneers included Alexander Cannon, Denys Kelsey, Morris Netherton and Edith Fiore (see *The Book of the Soul*).

The regression technique had been used sporadically for decades beforehand, but it appears that these therapists discovered it independently and more or less by accident, often when regressing patients into their childhood. Imprecise commands are taken literally by those under hypnosis, and when the patients were asked, for example, to "go back further", they suddenly began describing events that could not have related to their current life.

Intrigued, the pioneers experimented further and found in many cases that severe psychological and psychosomatic disorders—which had remained virtually untouched by years of conventional therapy—were completely alleviated, sometimes after only a few sessions of past-life therapy. And the therapy was successful irrespective of whether or not the patient or, for that matter, the therapist believed in reincarnation. It was this universal experience that convinced all of the pioneers that this was no mere placebo effect, and that reincarnation is a reality.

But even if materialists are completely unable to explain these various types of evidence satisfactorily, are there alternative paranormal explanations that do not involve reincarnation? One suggestion is that subjects are tapping into ancestral memories passed on in their genes. But many past lives are

found to be close together and yet to involve different continents or even races, at a time when people were generally not particularly mobile. Moreover, many of Stevenson's cases involve lives separated by only a few years, in which the two families involved are demonstrably *not* genetically linked.

The other potential paranormal explanation is that the subjects are tapping into some sort of universal memory or consciousness, and that the past lives accessed in this way do not belong to the individual concerned. But therapeutic results could never be obtained if this were what was happening. In addition, most cases of past-life regression show clear karmic linkages between lives that are personal and individual.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the most extraordinary cases investigated by Stevenson—those of children born with unusual birthmarks and defects. By investigating post-mortem reports and so on, he found that in a number of cases the birthmarks and defects corresponded exactly to the wounds that killed the previous personality the child claimed to have been and for whom other verifiable data had been given.

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Not only do they support the idea of the reincarnation of the individual soul, but in fact these birthmark and defect cases also provide the most convincing evidence that historical ideas of karma are inappropriate—even though their importance as pointers to karmic dynamics has not been properly picked up on before, and certainly not by Stevenson himself because he has always kept himself professionally removed from any pronouncements about the more far-reaching implications of his research. The subjects find themselves with what appears to be a physical "punishment" in their current life, and yet they were usually quite innocent *victims* in the previous one. How can that represent a karmic process of "action and reaction"? The answer, I have concluded, is that it does not.

Modern interlife research shows that more advanced souls not only conduct detailed reviews of their past lives, but also plan their next ones. And even when they choose adverse circumstances, such as physical disability or financial or emotional deprivation, they do so to *progress* their karma as part of a *learning* experience. But this research also shows that less-advanced souls often ignore all review and planning advice in the interlife, and as a result their lives tend to exhibit *repetitive* patterns.

However, even when as a result they repeatedly face similar adverse circumstances, the purpose is to give them another opportunity to *learn* the lesson that has escaped them in the past—and not because of some sort of karmic punishment or dynamic of action and reaction. The most crucial test is to properly assimilate strong negative emotions of hatred, fear, jealousy, revenge and so on, either during incarnate life or in the interlife, so that these emotions no longer hold their restrictive karmic charge.

The unfortunates in the birthmark and defect cases arguably seem, through having no proper interlife experience, to have retained rather than diffused emotions of such power from their last life that they were imprinted on their next body—although these might serve constructively as reminders that they have emotions from the past that need sorting out.

So my strongest conclusion from an analysis of the modern evidence is that karma and karmic progression are all about learning and experiencing both sides of every coin. There is no karmic law of action and reaction, and in fact this aspect of the revealed wisdom of the past is not just misleading but positively harmful.

Meanwhile, to place all this in its full context, the historical notion that the aim of all souls is to advance sufficiently to "escape from the earthly karmic round" is more or less correct, except interlife research also indicates that this is just a preliminary step—and even after this, there is considerable further learning and development to be undertaken in the ethereal realms.

## Future Lives and the Nature of Time

A few hypnotherapists have experimented with *progressing* their subjects into future lives. The first research was undertaken by Californian psychologist Helen Wambach, and was continued after her death by her protégée Chet Snow. It followed her pioneering work in regressing groups of subjects all at the same time, and the same protocol was partly used for the progressions.

The first point of note is that both Wambach and Snow appear to have been aficionados of the work of Edgar Cayce, the so-called "sleeping prophet" who predicted in his trance readings that there would be catastrophic "Earth changes" in various parts

of the world some time between 1958 and 1998. Snow's own detailed individual progressions with Wambach, conducted in the early 1980s but concentrating on his life in the late 1990s, appeared to bear out Cayce's predictions—which, of course, we now know have not come to fruition, at least at the present time.

Their subsequent group sessions, in which subjects were given the chance either to regress or to progress far further into a future life—in either 2100 or 2300—in

some ways appeared to bear out the idea of a global catastrophe occurring some time in the late 20th or early 21st century. But they also contained many developments, including extraterrestrial contact, that would arguably be expected from anyone who had ever watched a few science fiction or catastrophe movies.

The other main hypnotherapist to have experimented with individual progressions is again Californian: Bruce Goldberg. Certainly some of his case studies contain details at least as comprehensive as those in impressive regression cases, but he sometimes progressed his patients considerably further. On one occasion, he took a woman to her life in the year 3015. To summarise his somewhat confusing ideas, he argues that each future life is not totally predetermined and can have one of five "alternative frequencies", described as ranging from "very bad"

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"I'll do a discount on this baby because the battery pack doesn't charge up fully. However, you'll only be able to travel into the past or future about twenty minutes."

to "excellent". From a therapeutic perspective he insists that if a patient has a bad progression, he merely reprograms them to have one of the more pleasant versions. However, each of the alternatives involves the same person with the same broad circumstances.

So are future-life progressions in any sense reliable? Certainly the evidence is slim, and we know from Snow's predictions that they are not entirely accurate, not least in regard to their specific timing. But then, nor are many past-life regressions, which can involve elements of imagination and other information interwoven with genuine recall. However, the impressive level of detail in some of the progression cases suggests that we should not write them off completely without further consideration. But if they are at all accurate, what does that tell us about predetermination versus choice, and indeed about the nature of time itself?

In common with many others who like to question our conventional assumptions about time, both Snow and Goldberg mention Einstein's theory of relativity in what appear to be attempts to suggest that it does not operate in a flowing linear fashion—that is, *from* the past, *through* the present and *into* the future.

But I would argue that both are somewhat misrepresenting this theory. It is true that Einstein proved that space and time are not independent of each other and that, because light takes time to travel over long distances, events can only be described with complete accuracy by knowing the combined space-time coordinates of the observer. This is best illustrated over the massive distances encountered in outer space. To take the most extreme example, galaxies in the furthest reaches of our universe can now be detected by modern space telescopes. Because of their distance from us and the time it takes for the visible light they emit to get to us, what our astronomers are observing is the state of these systems as they were many billions of "light years" ago—that is, much closer to the point when the physical universe came into being. But this does *not* imply that time does

not flow as a linear phenomenon; it merely indicates that it can only be measured *relative* to the position of the observer.

Nevertheless, on the face of it, this theory suggests that we cannot objectively define anything called "now" because that moment is indeed relative to the observer. But this is a red herring for the type of analysis that is relevant here, especially because modern science—via the EPR [Einstein–Podolsky–Rosen] experiment and Bell's theorem, for instance—has also proved beyond doubt that other forms of non-light-based communication occur not only faster than the speed of light but in fact instantaneously. So, for example, if I were sufficiently advanced to be able to develop a telepathic rapport with an extraterrestrial on a planet 10,000 light years away and I asked them what they were up to *now*, they would not translate this into the context of visible light delays and try to tell me what they were doing all that time ago. Indeed, such an experiment would test their past-life memory to the full. Instead, they would

understand that in the instantaneous world of telepathic communication, their now is exactly the same as mine. So it is perfectly acceptable to use the concept of a universal "now" when we are operating in areas that are clearly beyond the normal constraints of the visible, physical world.

On that basis, I would propose that we think of time operating something like this. The past, present and future do exist as separately linked linear concepts, so that cause and effect do occur. However, there is a sense in which the future has already happened. Or perhaps it is better to say that a virtually infinite number of futures have already been *envisaged* but have not *happened* in any physical sense.

To understand what I mean by this, I need to refer to a consistent idea that emerges from interlife regression research, which is that at least reasonably advanced souls choose and plan their next life to give themselves the best opportunities for advancing their karma. In no sense are the snapshots of a potential next life, which some souls see, so fixed that they are totally predetermined. But they do represent major *probabilities* for that life, or sometimes lesser alternative *possibilities*.

So let us imagine that we can freeze time at a particular now, when one particular soul is seeing the next life they might lead and a number of major probabilities in that life as if it were already happening. This represents the most likely outcome if they intuitively follow their life plan and recognise the various triggers that will be provided to help them. But their life plan interacts closely with the plans of a number of other souls, especially those in their "soul group". And the life plans of particularly more removed souls will interact with a completely different group of souls that must then be considered in this version of the future. In fact, especially now that we live in times of extensive global travel and communication, it is almost certain that we could extrapolate with ease the connections in our original soul's life plan to every other soul on Earth. But these connections would not just stop when our original soul dies in that life.

They would carry on into the future *ad infinitum*. And this future of life on Earth would almost certainly at some point allow for space travel and colonisation as major probabilities, thereby connecting it to the future of every other inhabited planet in the Universe.

So we can see just how complex and all-encompassing this version of the so-called future would have to be. I would suggest that this means there is a sense in which this future does already exist, in the exact detail that it is envisaged at this "now" point by the "time master" souls who, regression subjects report, coordinate and supervise the next-life planning process. But the real complexity occurs as soon as we move away from this particular now and onto a new one.

It is obvious that, even in the split second it has taken you to read the last few words, millions of decisions that were not part of people's original life plans have just been made around the world.

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These effectively infinite and continuous adjustments to the most probable future are totally overwhelming to our mortal minds, but from all the evidence we have been given by our pioneers we must assume that they are well within the compass of the time masters who control the process. This is arguably the closest we might get to understanding the real meaning of the common suggestion that all possible futures occur in parallel universes.

So what are the implications of this analysis? The past is indeed fixed, and cannot be altered—at least not in the context of the fully interactive physical plane. But the future is not. At any one "now" point, there is only one version of the future that is most probable, but it changes almost instantaneously based on decisions taken by individual souls from moment to moment.

So no one will ever *experience* this particular version of the future in the physical realm because it will never happen exactly like this. But at our fixed point in time it nonetheless *exists* as a *conception* of the time masters.

I would therefore argue that at any "now" point it would be at least theoretically possible to progress a subject hypnotically so that, with varying degrees of clarity, they see the most probable version of the future as it is conceived by the time masters at that point in time. But would they be seeing their own *individual* future, or just a more general snapshot? If progressions are at all reliable, which is arguably a big "if", then the level of detail provided in some cases would suggest that the subjects must be seeing their own individual future lives as they stand at that point, even far into the future.

### Conclusion: The Future of Humanity

I hope I have shown that a spiritual worldview based on the twin concepts of reincarnation and karma is arguably the most logical we can adopt given the huge breadth and depth of modern evidence available to us. Moreover, karma most assuredly does not involve predestination and reactions to past events, but instead involves choices and learning.

But it is precisely for this reason that we would not expect attempts to progress people into their future lives to have any real validity. On a prosaic evidential level, if attempts to see further ahead in *this* life are not particularly accurate, to attempt to progress into *future* lives is likely to be even more fruitless. But from a philosophical perspective, if we could predict the future with any great accuracy, free karmic choice would go out of the window—and everything else we know from modern regression and other evidence would have to go with it.

Joan Grant echoes this view in her first autobiographical account of a past life, *Winged Pharaoh* (published in 1937), with a poetic beauty superior to anything I could achieve:

*The past is fixed; that which has happened cannot be changed. But every action changes a future that is fluid and can be modified in a past that is lasting. Your next day or the next life you will be born in is like your mirrored image in a pool: at any moment you can check what the pool of your future looks like, but through your own free will you can make storms rage over it or make waves on its peaceful surface. That is why so few forecasts bear out.*

Finally, it is fitting that we should consider what all this might mean for humanity as a whole. If we imagine our collective future as represented by the branches of the ubiquitous tree of life, one route through it may take us more or less directly towards the more spiritual existence that many think is our ultimate destiny. Another route may be much more tortuous and winding, but it may still, eventually, emerge into the light of the Sun. But I do not think we can be foolish enough to ignore the fact that some branches will wither and die, trapped in dense foliage before they get to the sunlight. Because of karmic choice and free will, these *are* all possible courses for the future of humanity.

**But they do represent major probabilities for that life, or sometimes lesser alternative possibilities.**

If we were to end up taking a dead end and destroying our magnificent planet, it would be a terrible indictment on our ability to treasure our physical birthright. But, even then, most Earth-connected souls would in all probability transfer over to other inhabited planets—to continue with the ultimate quest of the transcendent evolution of all souls, wherever their temporary physical home might be.

### References and Notes

- Lawton, Ian, *The Book of the Soul: Rational Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (Lawton Publishing, 2004); see especially chapters 3 to 8. Note also that I discuss the idea of psycho-spiritual "feedback loops", by which mechanism "time" might be conceptualised as running both concurrently and consecutively all at once, in a separate paper on my website at <http://www.ianlawton.com/bosmisc2.htm>.
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Ian Lawton was born in 1959. Formerly a chartered accountant and IT consultant, he turned his back on the commercial world in his mid-30s to become a full-time writer-researcher specialising in ancient history, esoterica and spiritual philosophy. His first two books, *Giza: The Truth* (1999, co-written with Chris Ogilvie-Herald; see review in NEXUS 7/01) and *Genesis Unveiled* (2002; see NEXUS 10/01), were published by Virgin and have sold over 30,000 copies worldwide. Through them he has gained a considerable reputation for adopting a scholarly and logical approach, even to the spiritual aspects of his research, and he has lectured extensively in the UK and USA. In 2004 he published his third book, *The Book of the Soul* (Lawton Publishing), the critical acclaim for which led him to found the Rational Spirituality Movement; see <http://www.rsmovement.org>.

For more details or to order the book direct, visit Ian Lawton's website at <http://www.ianlawton.com>.